

Recent school dropouts

Students who drop out of school have fewer opportunities to succeed in the work force or to assume a fully functional place in society at large than those students who complete high school. The event dropout rate, a measure of the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school, is one of several ways to define dropout rates.

- In October 1997, 5 percent of students who were in grades 10–12 the previous October were not enrolled and had not completed high school—that is, they had dropped out of high school sometime during the year.
- Generally, between 1972 and 1997, students in grades 10–12 from low-income families were more likely to drop out of high school than were their counterparts from middle- and high-income families.
- Between 1972 and 1997, the dropout rates for whites and blacks decreased, while the dropout rate for Hispanics did not change significantly. During this period, the dropout rate for blacks decreased at a faster rate than that for whites.
- Between 1990 and 1997, students in grades 10–12 whose parents did not complete high school had a substantially higher dropout rate than did those whose parents had attained a bachelor's degree (see supplemental table 51-1).

Event dropout rates¹ for those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24, by sex, race-ethnicity, and family income: October 1972–97

October	Total	Sex		Race-ethnicity ²			Family income ³		
		Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Low	Middle	High
1972	6.1	5.9	6.3	5.3	9.5	11.2	14.1	6.7	2.5
1974	6.7	7.4	6.0	5.8	11.6	9.9	—	—	—
1976	5.9	6.6	5.2	5.6	7.4	7.3	15.4	6.8	2.1
1978	6.7	7.5	5.9	5.8	10.2	12.3	17.4	7.3	3.0
1980	6.1	6.7	5.5	5.2	8.2	11.7	15.8	6.4	2.5
1982	5.5	5.8	5.1	4.7	7.8	9.2	15.2	5.6	1.8
1984	5.1	5.4	4.8	4.4	5.7	11.1	13.9	5.1	1.8
1986	4.7	4.7	4.7	3.7	5.4	11.9	10.9	5.1	1.6
1988	4.8	5.1	4.4	4.2	5.9	10.4	13.7	4.7	1.3
1990	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.3	5.0	7.9	9.5	4.3	1.1
1991	4.0	3.8	4.2	3.2	6.0	7.3	10.6	4.0	1.0
1992	4.4	3.9	4.9	3.7	5.0	8.2	10.9	4.4	1.3
1993	4.5	4.6	4.3	3.9	5.8	6.7	12.3	4.3	1.3
1994 ⁴	5.3	5.2	5.4	4.2	6.6	10.0	13.0	5.2	2.1
1995 ⁴	5.7	6.2	5.3	4.5	6.4	12.4	13.3	5.7	2.0
1996 ⁴	5.0	5.0	5.1	4.1	6.7	9.0	11.1	5.1	2.1
1997 ⁴	4.6	5.0	4.1	3.6	5.0	9.5	12.3	4.1	1.8

— Not available.

¹ The event dropout rate is the percentage of those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24, who were enrolled the previous October, but who were not enrolled and had not graduated in October of the current year.

² Included in the total but not shown separately are dropouts from other racial-ethnic groups.

³ Low income is the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes; high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes; and middle income is the 60 percent in between. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 53* for further discussion.

⁴ In 1994, the survey instrument for the Current Population Survey (CPS) was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion.

NOTE: Beginning in 1992, the Current Population Survey (CPS) changed the questions used to obtain the educational attainment of respondents. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 59* for further discussion.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States, 1997, 1999* (based on the October Current Population Surveys).

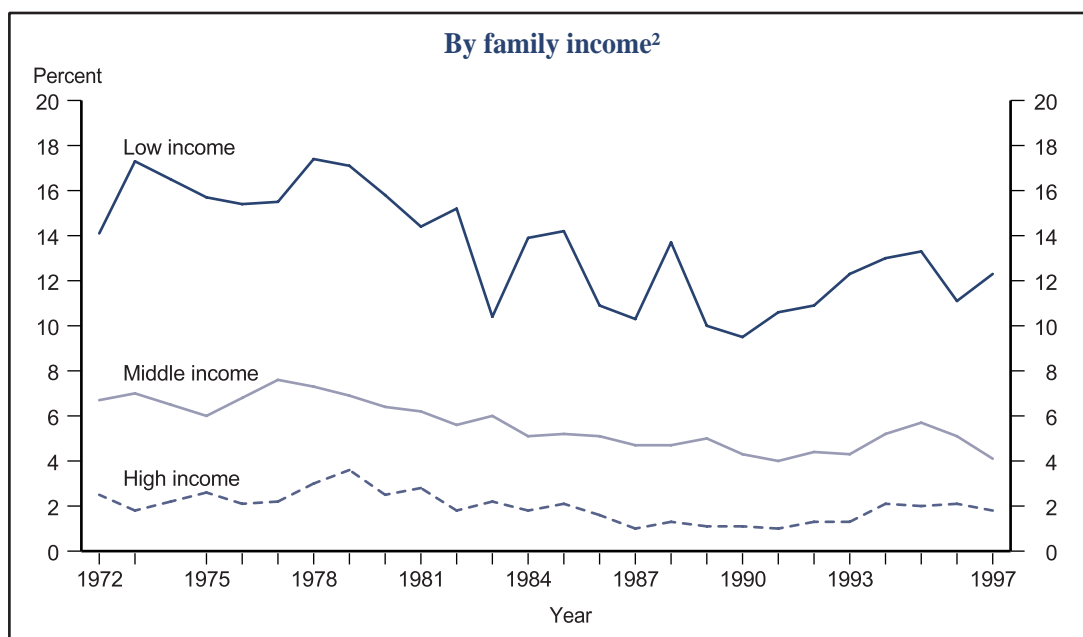
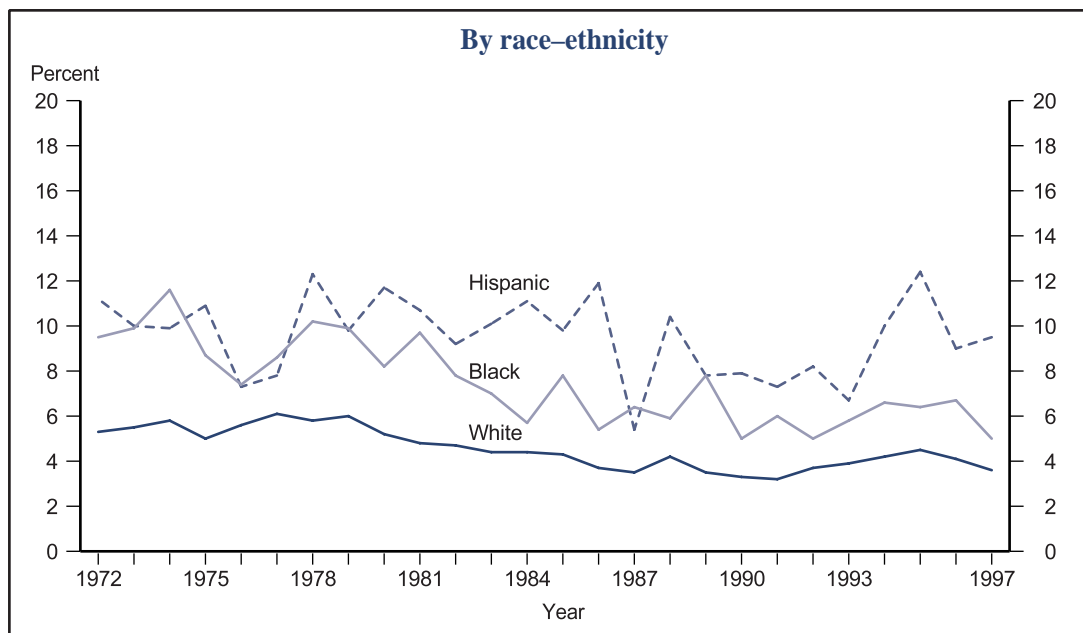
Table S51 **Standard errors for the text table in *Indicator 51***

October	Total	Sex		Race-ethnicity			Family income		
		Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Low	Middle	High
1972	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.3	1.3	2.8	1.6	0.5	0.4
1974	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.4	2.5	—	—	—
1976	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.4	1.2	2.1	1.6	0.5	0.3
1978	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.3	2.8	1.7	0.5	0.4
1980	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	2.6	1.5	0.5	0.4
1982	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	2.3	1.5	0.5	0.4
1984	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.1	2.5	1.5	0.5	0.4
1986	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.3	1.1	2.7	1.3	0.5	0.3
1988	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	3.1	1.6	0.5	0.4
1990	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	2.3	1.4	0.5	0.3
1991	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	2.2	1.4	0.4	0.3
1992	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.1	2.2	1.4	0.5	0.4
1993	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.2	2.0	1.6	0.5	0.4
1994	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.0	1.5	1.4	0.4	0.4
1995	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.0	1.6	1.4	0.5	0.4
1996	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.4	1.1	1.5	1.3	0.5	0.4
1997	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.9	1.5	1.4	0.4	0.4

— Not available.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States, 1997, 1999* (based on the October Current Population Surveys).

Event dropout rates¹ for those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24: October 1972–97



¹ The event dropout rate is the percentage of those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24, who were enrolled the previous October, but who were not enrolled and had not graduated in October of the current year.

² Low income is the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes; high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes; and middle income is the 60 percent in between. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 53* for further discussion. Data on family income were not available for 1974.

NOTE: In 1994, the survey instrument for the Current Population Survey (CPS) was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion. Beginning in 1992, the Current Population Survey (CPS) changed the questions used to obtain the educational attainment of respondents. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 59* for further discussion.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States, 1997, 1999* (based on the October Current Population Surveys).

Table 51-1 Event dropout rates¹ for those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24, by parents' highest education level:² October 1990–97

Parents' highest education level	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994 ³	1995 ³	1996 ³	1997 ³
Total	4.0	4.0	4.4	4.5	5.3	5.7	5.0	4.6
Less than high school completion	9.6	7.4	11.2	9.9	10.9	11.9	10.2	11.7
High school completion	3.4	4.3	4.6	4.7	6.7	7.5	⁴ 4.7	5.0
Some college	2.3	2.7	2.2	3.3	2.7	3.8	3.9	2.8
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.8	1.1	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.2
Not available ⁵	24.9	⁵ 22.2	18.9	17.3	24.7	22.7	27.8	19.5

¹ The event dropout rate is the percentage of those in grades 10–12, ages 15–24, who were enrolled the previous October, but who were not enrolled and had not graduated in October of the current year.

² Parents' highest education level is defined as either 1) the highest educational attainment of the two parents who reside with the student, or if only one parent is in the residence, the highest educational attainment of that parent; or 2) when neither parent resides with the student, the highest educational attainment of the head of the household and his or her spouse.

³ In 1994, the survey instrument for the Current Population Survey (CPS) was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to this indicator for further discussion.

⁴ Revised from previously published figures.

⁵ Parents' highest education level is not available for 1) those who do not live with their parents and who are classified as the head of the household (not including those who live in college dormitories); and 2) those whose parents' education level was not reported. In 1996, 23 percent of event dropouts ages 15–24 were in this category.

NOTE: Beginning in 1992, the Current Population Survey (CPS) changed the questions used to obtain the educational attainment of respondents. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 59* for further discussion.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, October Current Population Surveys, various years.

Table S51-1 Standard errors for table 51-1

Parents' highest education level	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Total	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3
Less than high school completion	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.6
High school completion	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.6
Some college	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5
Bachelor's degree or higher	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Not available	3.8	3.8	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.5	2.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census,
October Current Population Surveys, various years.

Recent school dropouts

In this indicator, recent school dropouts are measured using the event dropout rate. The event dropout rate is the percentage of students ages 15–24 enrolled in grades 10–12 in October of a given year who are not enrolled and have not graduated one year later.

Calculating the event dropout rate requires estimating 1) the number of students who left high school before graduating (recent dropouts) and 2) the number of students who were enrolled in grades 10, 11, and 12 the previous October. The event dropout rate for 1997 is calculated by using data from the October Current Population Survey (CPS). The numerator is estimated as the number of persons ages 15–24 who were enrolled in grades 10–12 in October 1996, who were not enrolled in grades 10–12 in October 1997, and who had not completed 12 years of school. The denominator is estimated as the event dropouts and those ages 15–24 who attended grades 10, 11, and 12 in October 1996 and were still enrolled, or who had completed 12 (or more) years of school and who indicated that they had graduated between October 1996 and October 1997. Those enrolled in special schools were counted as “not enrolled in regular school” and may have been classified as recent dropouts if they were enrolled in a regular school the previous October.

Change in CPS questions used to report educational attainment

From 1972 to 1991, the CPS defined educational attainment as “years of school completed.” Individuals who completed 12 years of school were regarded as high school graduates and those who completed 16 years of school were considered college graduates. The number of years of school completed was based on responses to two questions: 1) “What is the highest grade . . . ever attended?” and 2) “Did . . . complete it?” For example, individuals who responded that the highest grade they ever attended was the first year of college and that they did not complete it were regarded as having completed 12 years of school.

Beginning in 1992, these two questions were combined into a single question: “What is the highest

level of school . . . completed or the highest degree . . . received?” Previously, the earlier high school levels were listed as single summary categories such as “9th-grade, 10th-grade, or 11th-grade.” Then, several new categories were added, including “12th grade, no diploma”; “H.S. graduate—diploma or equivalent”; and “Some college—no degree.” Finally, college degrees were listed by type, allowing for a more accurate description of educational attainment. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 60* for further discussion on the effects of this change in measuring educational attainment.

Procedural changes

In 1994, the Bureau of the Census introduced several changes to the procedures used in the CPS. These changes may affect the comparability of current statistics to those derived from earlier surveys. In 1994, the sample weights were calculated using information from both the 1980 and the 1990 Decennial Censuses, and adjustments for undercounts were included. These adjustments resulted in the assignment of higher weights to any age, sex, or race-ethnicity group that was found to be underrepresented in the 1990 Census. In earlier surveys, 1990 population figures were based on the 1980 Decennial Census and information collected during the 1980s on births, deaths, and migration, and no adjustments for undercounts were made. If, for some groups, the latter produces different population estimates than the former, the sample weights would change, along with the statistics used to calculate them.

Also, the Bureau began using Computer-Aided Personal (and Telephone) Interviews (CAPI and CATI) to administer the survey in 1994. For earlier surveys, interviewers were given printed questionnaires to use. It is well known that the method in which a survey is administered can effect its responses. Although substantial testing was performed to minimize or predict these effects, all questions were not tested. Therefore, some statistics, such as dropout rates, may be affected by the change in survey procedures.